



Lorenz, Katharina (2007) The anatomy of metalepsis: visuality turns around on late fifth-century pots. In: Debating the Athenian cultural revolution: art, literature, philosophy, and politics, 430-380 BC. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 116-143. ISBN 978-052187-916-3

**Access from the University of Nottingham repository:**

[http://eprints.nottingham.ac.uk/29645/1/KGLorenz\\_Metalepsis.pdf](http://eprints.nottingham.ac.uk/29645/1/KGLorenz_Metalepsis.pdf)

**Copyright and reuse:**

The Nottingham ePrints service makes this work by researchers of the University of Nottingham available open access under the following conditions.

- Copyright and all moral rights to the version of the paper presented here belong to the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners.
- To the extent reasonable and practicable the material made available in Nottingham ePrints has been checked for eligibility before being made available.
- Copies of full items can be used for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.
- Quotations or similar reproductions must be sufficiently acknowledged.

Please see our full end user licence at:

[http://eprints.nottingham.ac.uk/end\\_user\\_agreement.pdf](http://eprints.nottingham.ac.uk/end_user_agreement.pdf)

**A note on versions:**

The version presented here may differ from the published version or from the version of record. If you wish to cite this item you are advised to consult the publisher's version. Please see the repository url above for details on accessing the published version and note that access may require a subscription.

For more information, please contact [eprints@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:eprints@nottingham.ac.uk)

*The anatomy of metalepsis: visuality turns around  
on late fifth-century pots*

Katharina Lorenz

Visual storytelling on pots of the later fifth century is different from the way stories are designed in earlier vase-painting. The stories depicted appear less dynamic or action-packed, the scenes are composed on multiple ground lines, and the number of labelled characters as well as abstract personifications rises considerably.<sup>1</sup> But even though these shifts carry the potential to signal an iconic turn which could also mark essential changes in general perception, this period has largely remained untouched in the intense research on storytelling in classical vase-painting, as for instance in the work of Wulf Raeck, Alan Shapiro, or Mark Stansbury-O'Donnell.<sup>2</sup> And even in those studies which focus on later fifth-century vase-painting, only two strands of interpretation for this period prevail: the pictures transmit peaceful and pleasant concepts of escapism which cater for a war-ridden Athenian population but at the same time are free of narrative and already signal the decline of vase-painting in general;<sup>3</sup> or the pictures are designed to provide stimulation for the audience of a newly developed culture of writing, an audience used to read stories line by line and on their own, with the vase-paintings solely providing illustrations of stories generated in other media.<sup>4</sup>

These two positions provide some of the co-ordinates which seem to be unavoidable when dealing with late fifth-century visual narrative: the end of Athenian vase-painting towards the middle of the fourth century, the Peloponnesian War, and the interdependence of literary and artistic media within Athenian culture. While the doomed end of a genre fails to

My warmest thanks go to the Fritz-Thyssen-Stiftung who funded the initial research for this study with a generous grant. Robin Osborne and Ivana Petrovic read and commented on earlier drafts, and I am indebted to them for their great expertise and their constant help.

<sup>1</sup> On personifications in Greek art: Shapiro 1993; Borg 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Raeck 1984; Shapiro 1994; Stansbury-O'Donnell 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Hahland 1930; Real 1973; Strocka 1975; Burn 1987; Burn 1989; Söldner 1999. A more diversified analysis: Borbein 1995.

<sup>4</sup> Giuliani 2003: 261.

function sufficiently as an argument against its originality or inventiveness, and while there is still the need to disentangle in detail the actual impact of the Peloponnesian War on Athenian artistic production, thinking about the specific qualities of transmission used in the single media, the literary and the artistic, opens a path for reassessing vase-painting in the later fifth century.

In the following, I will analyse storytelling in vase-painting with the help of an approach adapted from literary theory, focusing on narrative strategies, and specifically that of *metalepsis*, a term introduced by Gerard Genette to characterise situations in which actually distinct narrative levels are merged with each other.

My aim is to test if and in what ways a category used to describe a specific narrative strategy of a text helps to pin down the communicative potential of pictures and can account for what exactly makes vase-painting special on the verge from the fifth to the fourth century BC. This use of a category employed to characterise texts also serves a further purpose: to test Luca Giuliani's assumption that the later fifth century is the period in which visual storytelling becomes dependent on storytelling in written texts and tries to re-enact it to cater for the audience's new attitude of perception. In assessing the specific power of visual storytelling in the later fifth century through a literary category, it becomes possible to reassess this postulated relation of texts and images in this period.

#### VISUALISING METALEPSIS

What state is defined by metalepsis? And in what ways can a category developed to characterise texts be used to do the same for pictures? When Gerard Genette explains its functioning, he uses a short story by Julio Cortazar in which the protagonist is killed by a character from the book he is reading:<sup>5</sup> a fictitious character takes control of the realm of its (equally fictitious) recipient. Following Genette, metalepsis marks situations in which the boundaries between distinct narrative levels are crossed or even annihilated, an action performed by narrative agents stepping above or below their specific narrative level, via either a specific action or a speech act, and either within the text or even from text to recipient, as for instance when a character in a book directly addresses the readers and advises them to do something.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Genette 1980: 234–7; Cortazar 1977.

<sup>6</sup> Melina 2002; Jahn 2003: 2.3.5.

The quality and impact of metalepsis derive from breaking down one normally clearly separated level of narrative into another, or even into the reality the recipient occupies. Thus metalepsis denotes the transgression of narrative levels, with a disturbing effect on the recipients' anticipation, since the muddling of otherwise distinct levels of narrative and/or reality is not part of the general author–reader agreement. Yet, the effect on the shell-shocked readers is one of a more intense relation to the narrative(s): they need to reconfigure their anticipation, and they can even become part of the story, reacting to the demands posed on them by characters within the narrative. It is especially this last aspect which is generated because metalepsis as a narrative tool is more than just transgressing narrative levels and confusing recipients: by blending different levels of a narrative it constructs a mode of storytelling in which in some situations narrator, internal narrative, and external audience can meet face to face on the same narrative level. Thus, by manipulating the recipients' perception, metalepsis ties narration and audience closer together, letting the narrative take hold of or incorporate the readers who are originally external to the narrative, and thus extending its narrative impact.

In this sense, metalepsis characterises narrative situations which are already fuelled by visual qualities – as soon as a fictitious character steps into the world of another, hierarchically separated figure, the character gains a different quality of existence, and when a figure steps into that of the external recipients he gains a material existence; and as soon as the recipients feel the urge to react to the text they materialise themselves within it. The potential to be used for analysing pictures thus seems to be already inherent in metalepsis. Yet, from the perspective of visual art, the situation presents itself as more problematic. The key category, the narrative agent – such as a narrator – who defines and regulates the starting level from which the narrative hierarchy is derived, is hard to identify, if he can be identified at all: one could start from the protagonists of a scene if a picture features any, but just as a narrative text does not necessarily rely on its story's protagonists as narrative agents, this could also apply to the setup of a narrative picture, so the search for a protagonist could be in vain. Another vital difference between the media is that in visual art it is to be anticipated that the crossing of narrative boundaries will generally work through actions and not speech acts, at least in those cases which do not feature a mix of media within the piece of visual art itself.

Considering these co-ordinates as regards metalepsis in visual art, constructing such an effect in the visual appears to be an intellectual affair, and most of the modern pictures which create a situation of metalepsis are



Figure 6.1: 'The Eavesdropper', by Nicolas Maes.

immensely self-reflexive on their own status as visual monuments to create such an effect, as is, for instance, Nicolas Maes's *Eavesdropper*.<sup>7</sup> There, a maid standing behind a door, a short distance away from a man and a woman interacting, looks out of the picture on to the external spectators,

<sup>7</sup> Nicolas Maes, *The Eavesdropper* (1655). Collection of Harold Samuel, London.

and by putting her finger over her mouth indicates to them to remain quiet. In this way, the maid becomes the narrative agent who, skipping the narrative level by which she is separated from the external recipients, not only draws them into the same narrative level as herself – eavesdropping on a third party – but even regulates their specific attitude of perception, through an action which works as a silent speech act and transgresses the confined space of the picture frame. Whatever the basic hierarchy of narrative levels intended in the picture's inner narrative – Is the maid the narrative agent of the first order? Could the couples in the background possess the qualities of narrative agents? – the action of the maid creates its own hierarchy in relation to the external recipients in which her eavesdropping occupies the first level, and the couple the second.

These interacting spectator figures form a special case of visual narrative, and their morphing abilities make them seem only natural as a gateway through which another category from literary theory entered visual studies: reception aesthetics.<sup>8</sup>

The case of *The Eavesdropper* exemplifies that narrative in pictures can acquire the vital ingredients for a metaleptic situation: a hierarchy of narrative agents, as well as the crossing of narrative levels, through actions as well as through speech acts, which in their visual form remain of course silent. But how about metalepsis outside the world of spectator figures, and specifically in Greek antiquity?

While metalepsis forms a narrative reality in texts as early as Homer, who sometimes lets his auctorial voice address one of his characters directly,<sup>9</sup> transgressive narrative agents like the maid do not appear in pictures. What are more common from early on are figures who transgress the pictorial space confined to them: figures who look out of the picture or even figures who reach outside the picture frames on pots or in architectural sculpture. The most striking such situation is probably the giant in the frieze of the Pergamon Altar, whose knee rests on the steps of the altar's stairs.<sup>10</sup> This physically surmounting the pictorial space, especially, appears as a visual version of the crossing of narrative boundaries, such as between a narrative agent within a text and an external recipient: the character from the story materialises within the sphere of the recipient, neglecting his narrative's frame as defined by the pictorial space and thus violating any intradiegetic or extradiegetic mode of storytelling. In his seminal work on fourth-century sculpture, Adolf Borbein (1973: 43–61) has demonstrated

<sup>8</sup> Kemp 1998.    <sup>9</sup> E.g. *Iliad* 16.692–3. De Jong 2002: esp. 16.

<sup>10</sup> Northern projection of the Great Frieze; Berlin, Pergamon Museum. Zanker 2004: 103–12.

how such a reaching into the external viewer's sphere traceable in sculpture in the round can become an aesthetically defining element of a certain period.

The *Eavesdropper* gives an example of equivalent strategies of pictorial narrative in constructing a metaleptic situation – the composition of the figures and their interaction, the use of speech acts or speech-act-like actions. Yet there is one aspect not important for this picture but crucial for ancient visual art, and specifically for ancient vase-painting: the bodily presence of the material carrier. In vase-painting, this body is not just the surface around which the pictorial space is positioned; it also has another, doubled function: it both regulates the pictorial space and at the same time is a vital element of it, and above all it has the power to regulate hierarchies of narrative. As a 'body of narrative' the material carrier can achieve the role of an (extradiegetic) agent of narrative, opening or closing perspectives on to the story, emphasising or combining certain elements, and also helping to cross the boundaries of the narrative hierarchies it itself helps to regulate. This is where the text differs from the picture, and also where vase-painting, perceived within (and through) its material context, differs from flat-panel paintings or from productions on stage.

In what follows, these two aspects – the composition and the body of narrative – will form the co-ordinates within which I am aiming to calibrate the category 'metalepsis' for the visual to extract strategies of visual storytelling, and specifically of vase-painting in the later fifth century.

#### DOUBLED NARRATIVE? THE NICIAS PAINTER

A hydria by the Nicias Painter from the later fifth century presents the Judgement of Paris, a very popular subject in vase-painting as well as on the theatre stage in this period.<sup>11</sup> The vessel is decorated in an area which reaches from the shoulder down to the lower third of the body, and it offers three areas of action which are differentiated by their position as well as by the size of their figures, which is increased towards the outer layers: a central picture field, a figure between the attachments of each side handle and thus partly covered by the handle, and a figure to each of the further ends of the side handles.

The narrative is generated by ten characters. The Trojan prince Paris is presented in oriental dress and with a Phrygian cap. He is positioned left

<sup>11</sup> Hydria by the Nicias Painter, once Cancellio; from Suessula. Von Duhn 1887: pl. 12; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 1334.28; *LIMC* VII (1994), s.v. 'Priamos' no. 13 (J. Neils). On the myth in Greek vase-painting: *LIMC* VII (1994) s.v. 'Paridis Iuridicum' (A. Kossatz-Deissmann); also Raab 1972; Raeck 1984; Lorenz 2006.



Figure 6.2: Hydria, by the Nicias Painter. Once Cancellò. Courtesy of the German Archaeological Institute, Rome.

of the central picture axis and depicted in conversation with Hermes, who stands right in front of him. Underneath the prince lies a bull or cow, only its bust and forelegs visible as if hidden in a shelter. To the right of Hermes stands Athena, facing the two men. Behind her sits a second goddess, as indicated by the lotus-topped sceptre she holds. She is equally looking towards the two men, and she has raised her right hand as if waving, with her index finger extended. Considering her dress, posture, and even attributes – a partridge is sitting underneath her – she is probably Aphrodite. Such an identification is also supported by the little winged Eros who is aiming for her, floating between Hermes and Athena, and who carries a garland as if to indicate her victory. So the outcome of the judgement is already anticipated in the hydria's design.

The other five characters on the pot are more difficult to name. The goddess Hera is still missing from the band of goddesses, and since she appears in all pictorial versions of the story from this period she can be expected to be present.<sup>12</sup> Left of Paris stands a woman dressed in a richly ornamented peplos who carries a lotus-topped sceptre. She closely resembles Aphrodite, who sits on the other side, but in contrast to her this woman on the left is not focused on Paris and Hermes but looks outside of the central picture field to the left. Her sceptre supports her identification as a goddess, and her similarity with Aphrodite would not necessarily contradict

<sup>12</sup> Raab 1972: 37–41, 80–91.



Figure 6.2 (*cont.*).

the identification as Hera, since the two goddesses frequently look similar in the scenes of the Judgement.<sup>13</sup> What is more remarkable is that she is not interacting with the central scene, neither with Paris nor with her fellow goddesses.

In this respect, a character from the second pictorial layer outside the central picture field would fit an identification as Hera much better, even though she is bigger than the figures in the central picture field: between the handle attachments on the right stands a woman who has raised her heavy, unadorned garment in the modest *aidos* motif and looks towards the group of Paris, thus continuing the line Athena and Aphrodite have established. At the same time, her position between the handles as well as her size relate her to the male in oriental dress who stands between the handle attachments on the left side of the vessel: he looks almost exactly like Paris, and he carries two spears, as the prince does. He is about to move towards the left, but has turned his head towards the right, looking back to the central scene as well as to the woman between the handle attachments on the other side, and he has raised his right hand as if to wave or even to articulate a lack of interest.

The third layer is established by an old man with a beard, who, on the far right of the vessel, leans on a sceptre, and who is dressed in a mantle

<sup>13</sup> Raab 1972: 88–9.

and wears a fillet in his hair. He is mirrored on the far left by a woman in dress and mantle with a cap covering most of her hair.

To pin down the specific story, the identification of characters is the central issue, but there are no decisive clues offered apart from the figures themselves. This is noticeable since the vessel comes from a period in which labelling characters is both absolutely normal and necessary, since this is also a period in which personifications flood the images who otherwise could not be identified.<sup>14</sup> Here however, the use of script is confined to deliver strings of letter-like yet meaningless forms above the heads of the characters from Paris to Aphrodite.

Depending on the identity of the enigmatic characters, the actions on the hydria from Suessula can be broken down into three levels of narrative. The first level is the one of the actual judgement scene, of which Paris and Hermes as well as Eros, Athena, and Aphrodite inside the central picture field form a part. The woman left of Paris, earlier identified as Hera, is physically present only in this first level of narrative, but not in regard to her action, since she is interacting with the Phrygian between the handles on the left.

The second level of narrative is generated by the figures within the handle zone: on the left the Phrygian, on the right the woman with the *aidos* gesture. If seen next to each other, they appear as a generic scene of a soldier's farewell: the man carries his weapons and waves goodbye, the woman presents herself in the attire of a modest wife. It is this similarity to farewell pictures which has led interpreters to identify the woman as the nymph Oinone, who is, in the literary versions of the myth, left by Paris to abduct Helen, Aphrodite's reward for his judgement. This would mean that Paris is depicted twice on the vessel. But it is questionable if this layer's characters need to be identified as specifically as this, especially since there is a tendency to name anonymous female figures within judgement scenes on Attic pots as Oinone even though no evidence exists for such identification. Though the character is named for the first time in the later fifth century by Hellanicos,<sup>15</sup> labelled scenes which show her and Paris together appear only in the first century AD, and probably as a response to Ovid's *Heroides* 5.<sup>16</sup> So on the hydria, the two could equally well present a Trojan couple whose male partner has to leave to enter war. In the context of the judgement scene, one could assume the reason for the parting to be the Trojan War, which ultimately follows from Paris' decision, and thus

<sup>14</sup> On labelling personifications, see Shapiro 1993; Borg 2002; R. Osborne 2000.

<sup>15</sup> *FGrHist* 4 F29.

<sup>16</sup> For the myth: *LIMC* VII (1994), s.v. 'Oinone' nos. 23–6 (L. Kahil).

this second compositional layer would transmit a second level of narrative which follows sequentially from the judgement episode.

The third compositional layer, outside the handles, works slightly differently. Because of the specific royal attributes of the male, the two figures depicted here can be taken to represent Priam and Hecuba, the parents of Paris. They would not necessarily form a further sequence of the narrative which starts from the judgement and ultimately ends with the Trojan War, but rather a detached instance which explains Paris' existence and equally heralds the impact which his judgement will have on his family. This is a kind of sequential layering in a composition which can be found on hydriae as early as the Vivenzio hydria by the Kleophrades Painter depicting the Fall of Troy, where a further narrative is heralded by a group at each end of the multi-event picture, leading the picture field into a new future: Aeneas to the left, Aithra to the right.<sup>17</sup> Likewise, a hydria by the Coghill Painter which depicts the binding of Andromeda is complemented to the right-hand side by the depiction of Perseus, who already foreshadows Andromeda's later rescue.<sup>18</sup>

But this naming of the mythological characters can only partly account for the compositional dynamics of the vessel. It rather seems that the composition and especially the threefold vertical layering of the figures introduce a doubling and even an ambiguity of identification into the scene which the figures in their visual characterisation do not support, and into which they are forced solely by the compositional design. These dynamics are generated by the female figure left of the seated Paris as well as by the second oriental.

What the composition does for the myth becomes apparent in the farewell scene on layer 2. The difference from generic farewell scenes is that the recipients need to turn the vessel considerably to find the counterpart of both of these handle characters. The path of understanding thus leads the eye via the scene in the central picture field, and it is thus that these two levels of narrative – nicely constructed through composition as well as through the size and characterisation of the figures – are again deconstructed. When turning from left to right, the first mirror of the Phrygian's action is the woman with the sceptre, who was identified as Hera. It is here that narrative levels 1 and 2 collapse into each other. The goddess enters a narrative level below her own; the man – by leaving for the one above his own level of narrative – again marks the permeability of narrative levels.

<sup>17</sup> Hydria by the Kleophrades Painter ('Vivenzio Hydria'): Naples, Museo Nazionale Archeologico 2422, from Nola. *ARV* 189.74.

<sup>18</sup> Hydria by the Coghill Painter: London, British Museum E169, from Vulci. *ARV* 1062.

In this sense, both characters perform an act of metalepsis. At the same time, not only does this arrangement perform a common act of metalepsis, but, by crossing the narrative borders, the characters depicted also seem to change their identity. The oriental signals or waves to the goddess, an action which raises anticipation, especially as regards the identity of the one signalling as well as the one receiving the signal. What would a generic Trojan signal to a goddess, and to which goddess? The two Trojans who have a more intense relationship with a goddess are Anchises and Paris, and in both cases the goddess is Aphrodite. Given the iconographic similarities between the seated Paris and this man, it is justifiable to identify him again as Paris, appearing twice on the same vessel. The same applies to the goddess whose iconographical parallels to Aphrodite were already mentioned. Thus re-identified, this narrative-transgressing group would explicitly articulate the aftermath of the judgement, Paris's choice as well as his leaving for Helen.

When continuing to turn to the right, another re-identification comes up: the woman between the right handle attachments automatically becomes part of the band of goddesses within the central picture field, since she shares their focal point, the seated Paris, and in raising her veil she also performs an action very similar to those that Hera generally performs. Thus the woman, who on the second compositional layer mirrors the action of the Trojan who corresponds to her between the other handle attachments, thus also crosses her narrative level, and, becoming the goddess Hera, she materialises in the one above her own, the Judgement scene, which at the same time changes her identification.<sup>19</sup>

As already mentioned, the third level of narrative is formed by the bearded king and the elderly woman who stand outside the handles. Again they mark situations of transgressing the narrative levels, since the woman is not only a mirror of the king on the other side, but equally forms the destination to which the Phrygian between the handles is striving. In this way, she forms a typical character of a farewell scene – one of the parents who are present when their son leaves – and thus she again enters narrative level 2. At the same time, both of the distant characters take part not only in the action between the handle attachments but also in the judgement scene in the centre, in which they function as spectator figures. As such, there is another double crossing of narrative levels.

<sup>19</sup> For a parallel composition in which Hera is shown between the handle attachments, compare a hydria by the Modica Painter: Syracuse, Museo Archeologico Regionale Paolo Orsi 38031, from Modica. *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 1340.1.

Here, it is important to note that the picture demands a redefinition of narrative 'level', and this again marks a modification of metalepsis for visual analysis. In narratological terms all the characters depicted on the level would belong to the same narrative level, and only to different stages of the story. Yet, for the visual, a different principle of application seems to be necessary, since here the stages are not just different points along a line. They are, rather, distinctly used to reflect and comment on each other, as with Priam and Hecuba, who have no clear place in this line. Also, some of the characters can change their identity while moving from one level to another, and this is not a simple proleptic change of narrative stages, but a crucial modification, even a creation of new narrative. As such, they not only signal different points of reflection and abstraction, but also can generate differing narrative options, and subsequently need to be defined as distinct narrative levels.

With its different narrative levels and their interweaving, the vessel's decoration not only tells the story of Paris' judgement but also – in a specific as well as a generalising way – points towards its future course, visualising Paris' decision and departure as well as the impact on his family and on the generic Trojan. This anticipation of later events has the characteristics of a prolepsis in narratological terms,<sup>20</sup> which here gains further importance because the chronologically distinct levels are again metaleptically linked. Yet the proleptic and metaleptic elements of the visual narrative are not a direct part of the picture field, but are pushed towards its edges or even outside its boundaries, which are formed by the handles. Approaching the vessel frontally, these figures cannot be clearly perceived. They only come into play when moving the eye to the right or to the left – a possible viewer action at least stimulated by the goddess left of the seated Paris being oriented to the left and away from the central scene. By moving the eye, the viewer then also moves in narrative time and complexity, having to bridge the gaps as regards both content and temporal and narrative relations between the judgement scene and the four figures around the handles.

When considering the hydria in use, the dynamics go even further. One could take it by the two side handles, and thus exactly on the level of those figures – the Trojan-alias-Paris and the woman-alias-Hera – which (a) introduce a generalising element into the mythological cast, (b) construct proleptically different temporal stages, and (c) form a vital part of the metaleptic cracks within the picture's composition. Handling the

<sup>20</sup> Genette 1980: 33–85.

vessel, these characters are partly covered by the user's hands and – being thus invisible – could drop out of the picture, which would thus be relieved of many of its narrative frills. On the other hand, it is exactly this possibility of taking hold of the vessel in this specific place which invites the recipient to become literally part of the figure, substituting its body when grasping the handle. Such a direct contact with the scene's cast again creates a situation of metalepsis, in this case one that works between internal narration and external recipient. Again, as with the metaleptic situations inside the pictorial frame, this is generated not through a speech act but by requesting an action through the material carrier's design.

#### FRAMING REVOLUTION: THE VISUALITY OF ATHENIAN VASE-PAINTING

The example of the Nicias Painter's hydria brings up anew what exactly makes up for the specific ways of storytelling postulated here for the later fifth century: by simultaneously referring to different points of narrative (polychronous storytelling) as well as hinting at the future outcome (proleptic storytelling), it employs ways of storytelling which can already be found on vessels from the sixth or early fifth century onwards respectively, such as the Vivenzio hydria or the hydria by the Coghill Painter; and the feature of putting figures in between the handle attachments, so crucial for constructing interaction with recipients, also appears before the later fifth century, for instance on a stamnos in London by the Berlin Painter from the first third of the century.<sup>21</sup> In what ways does storytelling on late fifth-century vases differ from these earlier pictorial conceptions, and how was their special narrative potential developed? What is the visual corpus from which they emerge?

When browsing pots from the middle of the sixth down to the fifth century, the most notable feature is that figures are composed in frieze form, standing on a single, clearly defined ground-line, frequently acting within individual groups of twos or threes if not in a continuous movement in one direction. It is only with scenes from the second half of the sixth century that bystanders fill the picture fields, who primarily react to the action on display in the central scene.<sup>22</sup> This specific strategy of displaying figurative scenes is significantly altered only towards the middle of the fifth century with the designs of the Niobid Painter and his followers. While they still sport the

<sup>21</sup> Stamnos by the Berlin Painter: London, British Museum E444, from Vulci, *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 208.149.

<sup>22</sup> E.g. belly amphora by Lydos: Berlin, Staatliche Museen 1685, from Vulci. *ARV* 109.24.

traditional frieze compositions,<sup>23</sup> they are also the first to introduce designs in which the figures are spread in a random manner over the picture field, occupying different ground levels and thus interacting with each other from multiple angles. The most notable example is the Niobid Painter's name vase, a calyx-krater in Paris depicting Apollo and Artemis slaying the Niobids.<sup>24</sup> This tendency of spatial composition has frequently been connected with large-scale wall-painting, which, on the basis of later literary description, is presumed to have featured similar strategies of spreading figures in space, as in the Athenian Stoa Poikile. Whatever the influence of the other genre, many of the more influential vase-painters of the third quarter of the fifth century, the Polygnotos Painter and his group and the Cleophon Painter primarily adhered to frieze compositions. It is only with the Dinos, Eretria, and Meidias Painters and their followers that the spatial composition gains popularity again.

Next to the spatial placing of figures, the way the figures who form a picture's cast are characterised and brought into interaction with each other in a temporal perspective is a vital element in how vase pictures transmit stories. As frequently noted, the general narrative tendencies from the sixth to the fifth century change from the anachronic merging of different points in the narrative into one, synoptic scene towards compositions which focus on only one specific moment of the story,<sup>25</sup> or – as Giuliani (2003: 162–3) puts it – the trend goes from polychronous to monochronous pictures.

With regard to characterisation, earlier research is more divided. Wulf Raeck, who focuses on scenes of the Judgement of Paris, differentiates between how the individual figures and the scenes of action are characterised:<sup>26</sup> for him, the most elemental trend in fifth-century vase-painting is the emphasis on personal characterisation of single figures, which also becomes apparent in labelling figures, and not using standardised types. Giuliani – based on a critical discussion of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's Laokoon terminology – works from a different set of parameters, and differentiates between descriptive (*deskriptiv*) and narrative (*narrativ*) elements in pictures, as well as between figures who are used 'as attribute' (*attributiv*) and those who work 'as situation' (*situativ*).<sup>27</sup>

Giuliani claims that there is a trend in the fifth century for the cast to operate more and more on the *attributiv* level, an observation which could

<sup>23</sup> Calyx-krater with two friezes (Pandora, satyrs): London, British Museum E467, from Altamura, *ARV* 601.23; calyx-krater with two friezes (Gigantomachy, Dionysus): Ferrara 2891 (T. 313), from Spina. *ARV* 602.24.

<sup>24</sup> Calyx-crater: Paris, Louvre G 431, from Orvieto. *ARV* 601.22.

<sup>25</sup> Robert 1881; Raeck 1984; Giuliani 2002; Giuliani 2003.

<sup>26</sup> Himmelmann 1967; Förtsch 1997; Raeck 1984; Stansbury-O'Donnell 1999; Giuliani 2002, 2003.

<sup>27</sup> Giuliani 2003: 35, 283, 285–6 (*narrativ*); 36, 222–4 (*deskriptiv*); 160 (*attributiv*); 161 (*situativ*).

be put in parallel with Raeck's observation on the emphasis on personal characterisation, extending the picture's content from one primarily based on transmitting a 'pure' story ('narrative' in Giuliani's sense) to one in which the narrative is lifted to a more generalised level, which not only tells a good story but also serves further purposes of describing global conditions of life and offers points of identification which reach beyond the mythological level. As an example for this, Giuliani brings forward the Vivenzio hydria with its broad depiction of the cruelty of war, not just the transmission of a particular epic episode.

From the late fifth century – Giuliani claims – there is then a certain trend to narrow the narrative-cum-descriptive scope of the pictures to tell single episodes from literary narrative. It is this that enables painters now to refer to written texts and to an 'exact' storyline and not just to oraliture, the corpus of texts heard only as spoken word from a poet, which through its constant repetition gains a literary feel, but still one in which storylines can be altered and episodes are interchangeable.

Placing the Nicias hydria in the context of these trends, it becomes apparent that its basic frieze style design is rather conservative, and its employment of polychronous as well as proleptic elements is in a sense old-fashioned because it reaches back to developments already apparent in the middle of the sixth century. At the same time it employs them in completely new form. In the first place, these elements – via the scene's cast – are merged into each other further to specify the central scene, and at the same time also to create a collapsing but dense narrative which is driven by its metaleptic structure and as such has an intense effect on its viewers. The picture works like a hologram, which, as one moves the surface, changes its appearance, while the overall content is always there even if not visible. In this way, the well-known elements of pictorial storytelling are employed to create a new narrative situation, one in which also the attributive characters can gain narrative potential. The second formal innovation lies in its specific design. The decorated vessel surmounts one of the focal problems of visual storytelling, which is the question of how an image or picture can guide or control the recipient's gaze.<sup>28</sup> This is solved here through creating different layers of framed situations which can only be viewed from different perspectives: the central pictorial frame, the handle frame, the back area. Not all of these frames offer an actual narrative individually, but they do so in relation to each other, and that narrative crosses the borders of the single frames. And it is here that the novelty in pictorial design can

<sup>28</sup> Giuliani 2003: 286–7.





Figure 6.3: Hydria, by the Meidias Painter.

be located, a pictorial design which in its ambivalence, depending on the viewer's perspective, creates a narrative in the visual and one that only the visual could create.

#### LABELLING AND SPACING: THE MEIDIAS PAINTER

A hydria in London helps further to disentangle strategies of storytelling in late fifth-century vase-painting, again in respect of contextual movement

and with regard to the use of labels for characters. It is the name vase of the Meidias Painter, one of the most influential vase-painters in the later fifth century, whose name is derived from the potter's signature, 'Meidias epoiesen', on the neck of this hydria in London. The general design of the hydria is more complex than that by the Nicias Painter. Earlier hydriai had a shoulder frieze and a large picture field on the body of the vessel.<sup>29</sup> On the London hydria, what normally would be the shoulder frieze is stretched down to a level underneath the handles, thus creating a large, fairly trapezoid upper picture. Underneath is space for a frieze running around the whole vessel.

The two picture areas of the pot – the field above and the frieze below – have to be looked at differently. The upper field works as a panorama picture that can be fully perceived from above in an angle of about 15°. The frieze below can only properly be seen from a much lower viewpoint. Also, the frieze is no panorama picture but enfolds a narrative that has to be followed around the vessel. The linkage between upper and lower picture field is thus primarily restricted to the central part of the frieze just underneath the upper field.

If the viewers are to appreciate the complete decoration, they necessarily have to engage in some activity, by turning the vessel or by shifting their point of view. But they need to do more than simply turn it through 180°, which is sufficient for many Greek pots, where there is a picture on the front and another on the back. On the London hydria there are not two but multiple options of perceiving, and they merge into one another. They are equal, in that none of them offers a complete view of both of the picture areas. The decoration can be perceived only in single clippings, and thus the design of the vessel is constituted between opening and covering the single parts of the vessel.

The hydria shows the rape of the Leucippides in the upper picture field, and in the lower frieze Heracles in the Garden of the Hesperides, accompanied by a set of Athenian tribal heroes. Identification of characters is no problem here, since all are provided with name labels. As well as the vessel's general design, the choice of stories is remarkable. The Rape of the Spartan Leucippides by the Dioscuri almost never appears in Athenian vase-painting.<sup>30</sup> Close to the neck, two chariots are spread to either side. The one on the left has Polydeuces racing away with Elera; in the chariot on the right stands Chrysippus, who holds the reins, waiting for the other

<sup>29</sup> On this pot shape in general, see Diehl 1964: esp. 61–8.

<sup>30</sup> The only further evidence for pictures of this story in classical Athens is Pausanias, who talks about a painting of the wedding of the Leucippides in the Anakeion on the Athenian Agora (1.18.1).

pair, Castor and Eriphyle, who are just about to fly up from underneath. Between the two chariots is positioned an archaising statue, probably of Aphrodite, as indicated by the goddess herself sitting underneath next to an altar.<sup>31</sup> Aphrodite looks at the flying pair, as do most of the other figures in the picture: on the left Zeus, Agave, and Chryseis, on the right Peitho.

Lucilla Burn (1987: 15) called the composition 'centrifugal and cohesive', both at the same time. One reason for this impression is that an area close to the actual centre of the picture field is left empty, with single groups of figures arranged in a circle around it. At the same time, the scene is focused on Castor and Eriphyle, with at least five figures looking at them. The composition unfolds along two diagonal lines crossing each other in the group of Castor and Eriphyle. Thus a closely knit cross of action is created, with one line reaching from Aphrodite to Chrysippus, and the other from Peitho to the chariot of Polydeuces and Elera. Yet, with the action building up towards the end of almost each line (Polydeuces and Elera in the chariot are racing away, Peitho is running away, Chrysippus' chariot faces outwards) there is also a strong centrifugal element introduced that puts tension on the closely knit compositional centre. The composition is based on a central nucleus, but there are also dynamic forces guiding the eye away from it. Furthermore, this notion of dynamic is underlined by certain asymmetrical elements: the central figure group is not in the centre of the picture; and there is the group of Zeus, Agave, and Chryseis to the left, who do not directly belong to the closely knit cross-composition but react to it.

As to mythological identification, the name labels clearly identify both the Dioskouroi: Polydeuces as the character in the disappearing chariot, and Castor as the man in the central group. Yet the Leucippides feature under unusual labels. They are called Elera and Eriphyle, whereas normally in the literary sources they are called Hilaeira and Phoebe.<sup>32</sup> Whereas 'Elera' could be derived from 'Hilaeira', no straightforward connection between 'Eriphyle' and 'Phoebe' seems to exist. On the contrary, Eriphyle is one of the chief characters of a completely unconnected mythological story: she is bribed by Polyneices with Harmonia's necklace to talk her husband Amphiaras into joining the Seven against Thebes, though he knows he will meet his death there. Eriphyle features as the role model of the greedy, untrustworthy wife.<sup>33</sup> Given that, Castor would have made a very bad

<sup>31</sup> Burn 1987: 22.

<sup>32</sup> On the myth, see *LIMC* III, s.v. 'Dioskouroi' (A. Hermay). The inscription PHOIBE appears on a black-figure vase fragment: Reggio Calabria, Mus. Naz. 1027-8 (*LIMC* III, 1986 s.v. 'Dioskouroi', no. 194).

<sup>33</sup> On the myth *LIMC* III, s.v. 'Eriphyle' (A. Lezzi-Hafter).

choice in abducting her. Since the Meidias Painter is generally reliable in his labelling, what appears at first sight as a mistake could be a case of mythological allusion. In this way the artist could provide the group of Castor and Eriphyle with an attributive story element in regard to the potential course of their relationship otherwise not inherent in the myth. Such an allusion would not be unusual in this period, as Christine Sourvinou-Inwood has shown in her analysis of a cup-tondo by the Codrus Painter.<sup>34</sup>

With Chryseis and Agave, the two women left of the altar, more descriptive-cum-narrative elements enter the scene: these are 'speaking names': Chryseis is the golden, Agave the noble and brilliant. Both could bring in further mythological echoes, the first featuring in another case of abduction as Agamemnon's booty in the *Iliad*, the second as mother of Pentheus, who will slay her son, and is thus again not exactly the woman you would want to abduct.<sup>35</sup> On the other side of the altar appears Peitho, who personifies persuasion.

These figures all provide the scene with further narrative lines and even with a commenting counter-reading of the central scene of action. The abduction of the Leucippides appears remarkably harmonious compared with other scenes of rape: Elera stands in the chariot not fighting off Polydeuces but, rather, elaborately presenting herself in a motif typical of contemporary pictures of Aphrodite, thus underlining her beauty. The same applies for Eriphyle, who has taken a gracious position that seems fit for a dancer, floating in the air. Aphrodite, the goddess of love, and Zeus, the father of the Dioscuroi, further underline this jolly harmony by looking up to the pair, not disapprovingly, and so does Chryseis. It is only persuasion and nobility, Peitho and Agave, running away from this sight of harmonious rape. Despite the overall peaceful abduction, their running away seems to indicate that the scene is still a forceful rape, in which persuasion and nobility have no place.

In all, the strategies concerning the overall handling of the material carrier are also extended to the inner narrative structure of the panoramic field, requiring the recipients constantly to reposition themselves. The figures are linked to each other in a highly dynamic way: the separate actions are not presented discretely, but individual figures merge into or dissolve from particular interactive relations depending on the focus of the viewer's gaze. Also, the figures are connected to each other on multiple levels of meaning – situative in the case of the figures belonging to the same mythological story,

<sup>34</sup> Apparently his name-piece: Sourvinou-Inwood 1990.

<sup>35</sup> On the myth, see *LIMC* VII, s.v. 'Pentheus' (J. Bazant and G. Berger-Doer).



Figure 6.4: Hydria, by the Meidias Painter.

and attributive in the case of the personifications and those figures that do not belong to the inner circle of the Leucippid story but here act in it via the metaphorical or mythological content that floats in the background.<sup>36</sup> In the end, the viewers get both: men and women gracefully pairing off and just a hint of a real, forceful rape picture.

The design of the upper pictorial field is very much in contrast with what is depicted in the lower frieze. Except for the frontal part of the frieze, which depicts Heracles in the Garden of the Hesperids,<sup>37</sup> the figures are set in traditionally composed three-figure groups, and the men are not dressed in elaborate clothing, as the Dioscuroi above are, but rather appear undressed, carrying a mantle and spears. Again, it is the name labels that help to identify the characters; a necessity, since the visual characterisation of the cast is in most cases rather generic. The focus in the central part is towards the right on the seated Heracles, who looks on to the Hesperid Lipara. Standing in front of him, she displays her beauty in a similar way to

<sup>36</sup> On similar narrative strategies in theatre plays, see Zeitlin 1990, 1994.

<sup>37</sup> On Hesperides in general, see *LIMC* v, s.v. 'Hesperides' (I. McPhee); also Brommer 1942.

the two Leucippides above. To the left, behind the apple tree, three women and a man watch this scene, and behind Heracles stands Iolaus, who is about to move to the right but looks back.

Moving to the right, underneath the side handle, a group of three women follows. Arniopé and Elera frame Medea, who – unlike all the other women on the pot – is dressed in oriental garments and carries a casket. Further to the right follows a group of two: Philoctetes, facing the old, seated Acamas, one of the Athenian tribal heroes. Another three-figure group follows, consisting of another two tribal heroes, Antiochus and Hypothous/Hippothon, as well as Clymenus. Underneath the left side handle the last three-figure group is positioned, formed by Oineus, Damophon, and Chryseis.

It is unclear in what sense the scene in the garden is connected with the cocktail of primarily Athenian characters, especially since some of the names given to the figures are so general that it is difficult to connect them to a specific storyline. Only the double appearance of Elera and Chryseis, who were already on display in the upper picture field, might indicate some connection between the two story fields.

Earlier interpretations have variously claimed an escapist or a political meaning for the frieze and its combination with the upper pictorial field, and sometimes both these diametrically opposed explanatory strategies have been combined.<sup>38</sup> When seen from a structuralist point of view, the central part of the frieze, as well as the upper picture field, both show scenes of heterosexual courtship which differ in the reaction they receive from their spectators: no one in the lower frieze is running away. They are rather calmly focusing on Heracles and Lipara. So while the set of two mythological stories on the vessel could cater for an interest in heterosexual relationships and how they are established, the remaining figures in the frieze are more difficult to pin down because they contradict various schemes: with the closed-off groups they work against the concept of centrifugal and open design so characteristic for the other parts of the pot, and they do not present a clearly identifiable story but rather feature a cast which is descriptively connected to Athens – four tribal heroes, a king, a son of Theseus, and Medea – but not completely, since some of the names are, again, rather generic names that could belong to personifications (Clymenos, Chryseis).

The easiest explanation of this scene in the lower frieze is that this compositionally clearly distinguished part of the vessel also tells us something different, and in this case not a narrative but a description of Athenian heritage, in which Medea is not so much an evil sorceress as an equal part

<sup>38</sup> Burn 1987: 21.

among the rather loose set of kings and heroes. In combination with the other two pictorial areas, this establishes two distinct areas of transmission, one of narrative and one of description, with the former being spread across both the areas on the front of the vessel, and the latter confined to the back area of the hydria. Through the similarities in composition a case of spatial metalepsis is generated which links the Leucippid and Hesperid stories and – crossing the borders of mythological narrative – associatively draws the latter into the former, an act which happens in the external spectator's mind through the device of comparison. But this is not the only level of metaleptic action: even the compositionally distinct back part of the frieze, which lacks the vital ingredients of a narrative, also crosses the border into the upper picture field, doing so not through narrative layers but through modes of transmission, from the descriptive into the narrative, again established through comparison as manifest in the repetition of characters' names, Elera and Chryseis, and thus their potential double appearance in the groups which frame the paratactic back part of the frieze.

This form of modal metalepsis, between the narrative and the descriptive, again brings into focus the functions of the material carrier of the pictorial frames, the vessel: while the turning needed to experience the single areas further underlines the borders between the distinct modal areas, on the front of the vessel between the two areas of narrative, and from the front to the back, between the narrative and the descriptive, it is the compositions that – through parallel compositional postures as well as name labels – cross these borders again and force the viewers to move back and up. In this way the metaleptic values of the objects on display are not just confined to the mental experience of the recipients but are generated and become corporeal on and through the narrative body of the vessel: the crossing of different layers of transmission is a crossing of different areas of the pot.

With all this, the London hydria makes great demands on its viewers: by requesting a turning of the vessel, the arrangement of the pictorial areas leads to a continuous alteration of the modes of transmission. The viewers have constantly to reposition themselves, and this repositioning offers them, or shuts them off from, single insights into the scenes' content. By applying these visual strategies on the vessel, a way of storytelling is established which can be characterised by the simultaneousness of different modes of transmission and media (visual and textual). This design feeds on communicative options of constructing a text, but at the same time, by organising them in combination as well as by exploiting the potential for

creating metaleptic suspense which the hydria as the material carrier offers, this design enables a refreshed and strictly visual transmission of content.

#### THE BIRTH OF ERICHTHONIUS – MULTISTABILITY V. ESCAPISM

The example of a squat lekythos by the Meidias Painter in Cleveland offers the chance to explore further two aspects of visual storytelling in the later fifth century: the identifiability of characters and escapism,<sup>39</sup> the latter being the main argument for the pots to be free of narrative.

The vessel displays the Birth of Erichthonius, the first king of Athens.<sup>40</sup> This subject appears throughout the fifth century on pots, and in the later fifth century fits in well with the general rise of topics related to Athens. It has generally been considered a particularly patriotic theme that underlines the autochthony of the Athenian people as well as their noble divine roots; it also features in Euripides' *Ion* to stress exactly this fact.<sup>41</sup> The Meidian squat lekythos performs a noticeable twist on the common patriotic outline, generated by the way the figures are identified.

A three-figure group shows a seated woman, identified as Ge, handing a baby, identified as Erichthonius, to Athena, who stands in front of her. This is just one group among others on the vessel, and it is nothing like a central group, since the three are positioned slightly off-centre to the right. By contrast to other versions of the story, the chthonic goddess Ge is neither half hidden in the ground nor crowned, but rather sits fully visible, very much like any other ordinary woman.<sup>42</sup> This simple fact is remarkable, since all the other figures in the scene are also women: five to the left of the group; four to the right, and three above it. Some of these women watch the three-figure group; others are engaged with each other. In their composition, they help to generate a spatial effect in the picture as well as to establish multiple links of visual and actual communication between the single figures, as is typical for Meidian scenes. Yet, quite unusually, none of them is named.

Attempts have frequently been made to label them as the personifications which appear so frequently on other vessels, or even as certain mythological figures who foreshadow the further stages of the Erichthonius myth. Jenifer Neils (1983) identified the women in the upper level as the three Kekriopidai to whom Athena will hand Erichthonius. But such an explicit identification

<sup>39</sup> Squat lekythos: Cleveland, County Museum of Art 82.142.

<sup>40</sup> On the myth, see *LIMC* IV, s.v. 'Erechtheus' (U. Kron).

<sup>41</sup> See Burn 1987: 21–2; Walsh 1978; Neils 1983, with identification of the female figures.

<sup>42</sup> On the myth, see *LIMC* IV, s.v. 'Ge' (M. D. Moore).





Figure 6.5: Squat lekythos, by the Meidias Painter.

is not necessary to make sense of the scene; even the woman handing over the baby does not have to be the goddess Ge. If she is rather a generic Athenian woman passing her baby to Athena, this would become a truly and all-embracing patriotic image, and one in which such an action is only one kind of female behaviour, shown among others, and not in a central position. Viewed in this way, the visual structures adopted from other presentations of the Birth of Erichthonius – especially the handing of a baby boy to Athena – are employed to present a not necessarily mythological version of giving birth to male offspring and putting them in the hands of Athens. As such, this forms an example of patriotic ideology and provides a female audience with behavioural ideals.

Just like the back part of the Meidias Painter's hydria, the squat lekythos's decoration transmits a rather descriptive gathering of women, and one in which anonymity is a key issue, since it is only Athena who can be clearly identified through her disposition. The scene gains narrative potential only in the handing over of the baby, which raises various questions about the reasons for and consequences of this act. Again, narrative and descriptive parts are blended into each other on this vessel and here help to generalise the narrative sequence and allow it to gain universal meaning.

This oscillation between mythological and more general ideological meaning creates a situation of multistability, an ambiguity between mythological and allegorical meaning. This is generally a feature very characteristic of Athenian vase-painting, where there is frequently a narrative and ideological tension – the characters could be mythological or generic, or both at the same time, as is also true for the hydria by the Nicias Painter. In this respect, vessels like the London hydria reduce the suspense because they provide labels. There, a tension fuelled by ambiguity enters only through the back door, with the mythological characters known from other stories. Especially regarding the frequency of name labels on other vessels by the Meidias Painter, the lack of them on the Cleveland lekythos demands an explanation, which here appears to be the marketing of patriotic imagery which wants its audience to identify directly with the cast.

This is a vessel whose decoration crosses the borders between different layers of transmission, and in this case those between mythological and generic/allegorical narrative or even description. And as before, this transgressive energy is produced not only through the characters and their action, but also through the vessel's design in which – again – a central representation is avoided, and the recipient is guided through the various groups on display. In its marketing ideology in a descriptive way, the decoration is marked by elements of non-narrative. But this lack of storytelling

does not create an escapist situation, even though the general theme – a congregation of women engaged in idle, female tasks among flowers and bushes – could at first sight fit in with notions of escapism. In play, however, the scene is anything but escapist; it is a bold ideological statement to produce Athenian offspring, and thus fits in very well with common wartime propaganda.<sup>43</sup>

#### CONCLUDING METALEPSIS: EVIDENCE FOR AN ICONIC TURN?

The three examples show that applying a descriptive term like *metalepsis*, drawn from literary theory, to visual analysis of vase-painting demands a redefinition of this term for this special purpose. First of all, the role of the narrative agents is primarily defined by the composition and interaction of the figures, as well as by speech acts or speech-act-like actions, but also to a large extent by the pot on which the figures are positioned. In vase-painting, it is the pot that can serve as the ‘body of narrative’ which takes the role of an (extradiegetic) agent of narrative which guides the recipient. At the same time, the definition of narrative levels needs reconsideration when faced with a pictorial narrative. As the case of the Nicias hydria has shown, narrative stages on a pot can become narrative levels, or can be both simultaneously through the help of their material carrier. This can create proleptic-cum-metaleptic situations which in a text would be only proleptic, reaching from one narrative stage into the next. On the hydria, however, this can equally well become a clash of different narrative spheres which turn the figures’ identification upside down and thus generate a *metaleptic* whirl as the vessel is turned.

Yet the pots are designed *metaleptically* not only as regards the narrative levels of their cast, but also as regards their modes of transmission, a case of *modal* *metalepsis*. In narratologic terms, this is probably rather a phenomenon characterised as a change of perspective or of transmitting voice. The case of the Meidias hydria, however, exemplifies that in the interplay of the material carrier as body of narrative with the composition and name labels, structures can be generated which are equivalent to the crossing of narrative levels characteristic for *metalepsis*. They emanate from the physical crossing of borders on the vessel, the body of narrative, which equates distinct levels of transmission, and they occur between the narrative and descriptive areas, as well as between attributive and situative elements.

<sup>43</sup> Given this, it could be worth reconsidering female scenes on pots of the Meidian circle, which, after all, account for 70 per cent of the approximately 200 vessels extant.

It is here, in redefining *metalepsis* for visual analysis, that the specific qualities of late fifth-century vase-painting also become apparent. As discussed earlier, many strategies employed on these vessels stem from the standard corpus of storytelling in Greek vase-painting; and some are even rather old-fashioned, such as the employment of *polychronous* and *proleptic* elements as well as the play with the ambiguity of characters. And yet the employment of these elements is rather eclectic and clearly functionalised to reach or support a specific quality: the corporealisation of the material carrier and its narrative potential. The shape of the pot is now exploited as narrative engine, something it always has been to a certain extent, but certainly never as fully realised. The pot's surface becomes a holographic foil, gaining its qualities from the fact that it can be moved around sideways as well as up and down, a quality which especially applies to the *hydriai*. These hologram pots bear a corpus of content, but can subsequently open or close it to the viewers and thus guide the viewers' gaze, a crucial achievement for visual matter. And it is only through guiding the gaze that these pots are able to create *metalepsis*, either between different narrative levels in the picture field, or between the different pictorial frames on their surface which, because the pot is also a narrative level, appear equally well as different levels of transmitting information.

Applying *metalepsis* underlines that the strategies employed on these vessels are anything but free of narrative. Neither do the topics depicted support an escapist interpretation, especially because they force the recipients constantly to reposition themselves between different kinds of transmission – mythological, allegorical, real-life – and subsequently between different kinds of identification with the picture presented. Similarly, through the lens of *metalepsis* it becomes apparent that these pots deliver a pictorial design which in its ambivalence depending on the viewer's perspective creates a narrative in the visual, one that could only be created in the visual. Through the turning of the vessel, viewer–object relations and with them situations of *metalepsis* are created which a text could not generate, unless it had a material carrier which simultaneously operated as (extradiegetic) narrative agent. So while the design of these vessels, with their labels and different narrative stages, feeds on the strategies of constructing a text, the corporeality of the 'body of narrative' establishes the crucial difference between a text and this kind of pot.

While the impact of a culture of reading on fourth-century vases from South Italy has been clearly established by Luca Giuliani, it does not apply to the Athenian vase-painting of the later fifth century, nor do these pots offer a link to later developments in the West. On the contrary, they exemplify a

period of heightened awareness for issues of the visual and of how to guide recipients. The painters of the pots discussed here certainly take account of how texts can work, even though these texts need not be corporeal, as in a scroll, but could equally well be oraliture. But they use this knowledge, not to cater for readers, but to explore new ways of the visual, and they do so by relying on the most basic visual feature of their genre, the storyscapes offered by the pots. By doing so the pictures created surmount the confines of their flat and stationary surface, and with it also those of their medium. And in making the recipients turn the vessel, vase-painters in the later fifth century also signal an iconic turn.